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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#) [HK](#) [MC](#)
SUBJECT: FALUN GONG'S VIRTUAL SKELETON

REF: HONG KONG 4115

Classified By: E/P Chief Laurent Charbonnet. Reasons: 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: As reported in reftel, the Falun Gong (FLG) movement has virtually no organizational structure, coordinated policy, or central financing; rather, it is a very loose association of practitioners who communicate through emails and regularly-held meetings. Given FLG's virtual structure, the free and secure exchange of email communications--and the unfettered publication of FLG-related news--is key to the movement's success. According to an FLG activist in late April 2007, a series of events raised concerns among the FLG over the integrity of their email and computer networks. Thus, FLG started to discuss plans for the development of a formal vetting process for "high profile" members working at The Epoch Times or other FLG-associated media organizations. Wang Lian was reportedly detained, interrogated, and ordered to disrupt the Hong Kong office of The Epoch Times. Revelation of his story stirred concern among local FLG practitioners. (Note: Paras 2-4 include one FLG activist's readout on Lian's story. Paras 5-6 include the same activist's comments on FLG cyber tradecraft. End note.) End Summary.

Stress Fracture in the Media Bone?

¶2. (C) In February 2007, FLG started to discuss plans for the development of a formal vetting process for core members working at "The Epoch Times" (ET) and other FLG-associated media organizations. According to Sophie Xiao (strictly protect), an FLG activist in Hong Kong, another FLG member and ET technical advisor, Wang "William" Lian (strictly protect), traveled to Zhuhai and was detained by Public Security Bureau (PSB) officials for interrogation in September 2006. (Note: ET also published a series of reports about Lian's story, including transcripts of his personal statements emailed to the newspaper, in mid February ¶2007. Please refer to <http://en.epochtimes.com/news/7-2-19/51859.html> and associated links. End note.) After his interrogation, Lian was released with instructions to meet with a contact in Macau, where at the time Lian was living and working as an assistant professor of information technology at the Macau University of Science and Technology. Lian said that the contact in Macau, as well as a few of the PSB officers who initially detained him on the mainland, directed him to gather and deliver technical details related to The Epoch Times' computer networks here in Hong Kong, and to "disrupt the communications and publishing of The Epoch Times, especially its web-based reports." Lian handed over several .pdf files with some details related to The Epoch Times' networks, mainly due to fear of reprisals against him or

other FLG members or Epoch Times employees.

¶3. (C) Lian also told FLG members in Hong Kong that during the interrogation, he increasingly realized that the authorities already knew a great deal of his personal information and showed him a "thick folder" of information related to him, much of which he had never made public. Lian speculated (without offering evidence) that only weeks before his detention he had applied to renew his Hong Kong identification card, at which time the Hong Kong authorities could have relayed some of this information to the mainland. Lian also said his interrogators referred to detailed records of his communications, including emails, and that these references caused him to question the extent to which he maintained any level of personal privacy or security. Xiao told poloff that Lian has since fled to Australia.

¶4. (C) Xiao told poloff that following Lian's detailed account of events following his interrogation, Hong Kong-based FLG members grew concerned about the integrity of communications among members, as well as FLG media networks, drawing mainly on three related incidents. First, members speculated about a connection between Lian's story and that of Dr. Peter Yuan Li, Chief Technical Officer for The Epoch Times, who was attacked at his home in Atlanta in February ¶2006. According to various media reports, a group of "Asian men," at least one of whom spoke Chinese, forced their way into Li's home, attacked him, and left his residence with only two laptop computers and a few documents. Dr. Li claimed that The Epoch Times--similar to major news organizations like CNN and the New York Times--had "anti-blockage technology" that allowed mainlanders to receive information through FLG media channels. Second, in late-February 2006, four unidentified men broke into the Hong

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Kong office of The Epoch Times and smashed a "specialized printer" used for processing the daily's pages. Aside from breaking the door to gain entry, the perpetrators reportedly did not damage any other equipment in the office. The Epoch Times also publicized difficulties finding a printing company in Hong Kong, and eventually opted to print the daily paper in-house, increasing the impact of the destruction to the printer. Finally, local FLG members expressed concern over a new member of The Epoch Times' staff from the mainland who had been "acting suspiciously," asking multiple managers for approval to stay late and even sleep in the office. He was later dismissed for his suspicious requests.

The Marrow: FLG Communications Security

¶5. (S) Xiao also told poloff about some FLG members' efforts to complicate monitoring of their email and phone communications. For example, FLG members often used an alias or pseudonym in their communications to conceal their identities. Members also use a variety of revolving email accounts in order to complicate monitoring of their communications. Xiao said that another reason for these tactics was FLG's use of listservs -- group email addresses often organized to simplify communications among large groups of people related to a predetermined topic -- which, if used improperly, could expose the interest and/or affiliation of members. (Note: Xiao passed to poloff copies of email communications, including listserv information. End note.)

¶6. (S) FLG members, including Xiao, also have asked poloff to limit telephone discussion of FLG-related matters for fear of "mainland monitoring." In private conversations with FLG members, they said they had no specific evidence of telephone monitoring but presumed PRC authorities or intelligence collectors targeted them for monitoring of their daily activities, largely based on stories such as those described above.
Cunningham